'The best combined guide to planting and designing a garden ever written'
INDEPENDENT

Russell Page

The EDUCATION of a GARDENER

INTRODUCED BY
ALAN TITCHMARSH

EX LIBRIS

VINTAGE **CLASSICS**

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

RUSSELL PAGE

Russell Page became a professional garden designer in 1928 after studying painting at the Slade School, University of London, and in Paris. He designed a great variety of gardens in Europe, the Middle East, North and South America, ranging from small cottage and town gardens to elaborate layouts including the Battersea Festival Gardens in 1952. He was one of only three Englishmen to have received a medal from the French Academy of Architecture.

Russell Page died in January 1985. After his death, *The Times* wrote: 'In a world in which the gifted amateur is no longer the guiding light in the design of gardens, and in which highly qualified professionals prevail, Russell Page stood out as one of those great originals, for which England has been famous.'

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

RUSSELL PAGE

The Education of a Gardener

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Alan Titchmarsh

WITH A FOREWORD AND
CAPTIONS TO THE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Fred Whitsey

AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Russell Page and Marina Schinz

VINTAGE

Copyrighted Material

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Vintage Classics is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

Penguin
Random House
UK

Copyright © the executors of the Estate of Russell Page, 1994
Introduction copyright © Alan Titchmarsh 2023
Foreword and captions to the photographs copyright
© Fred Whitsey, 1994
All photographs are copyright the Estate of Russell Page, Marina Schinz and others as indicated in the List of Illustrations

Russell Page has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published in Great Britain by 1962 by William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd
Reprinted with a new preface in 1983
Published in paperback in Great Britain in 1994 by Harvill
This paperback first published in Vintage Classics in 2023

penguin.co.uk/vintage-classics

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781784877743

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

Copyrighted Material

To my father and my mother

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

Contents

List of Illustrations xi
Introduction to the 2023 Edition xv
Foreword to the 1994 Edition 1
Preface to the 1983 Edition 3

INTRODUCTION

The education of a gardener 13

PART ONE

I In search of style 45
II Notes on composition and design 67
III Sites and themes 91
IV Near the house 113
V On planting: trees 144
VI On planting: shrubs 175
VII On planting: flowers 202
VIII Water in the garden 222

PART TWO

IX Town gardens and others 251
X Switzerland and Italy 273
XI The South of France 295
XII For the public eye 312
XIII My garden 347

Index 365
Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

List of Illustrations

SECTION I *(between pp 20 and 21)*

Four views of a Louis XV château west of Paris
Twin pools and box parterres at Longleat, England
Two views of the broad avenues at Longleat
Three views of the terrace at the Creux de Genthod in Switzerland
The garden at the Creux de Genthod
A carousel donkey at the Creux de Genthod

SECTION II *(between pp 84 and 85)*

The façade and back of Fresnay le Bouffard
The vast lawn and canal at Mivoisin*
Exploiting existing features: an old gate†
Making use of local materials
A traditional parterre
Circular steps at White Birch Farm, Connecticut†
A "chequerboard" of box at the Domain St Jean, Orléans‡
Contrasting foliage
A maritime garden
Two ways of achieving spaciousness

SECTION III *(between pp 148 and 149)*

Aquilegia at Chanteleau**
The wall at Chanteleau
The former rose garden planted with myrtle at Tor San Lorenzo, south of Rome†
The olive grove at Tor San Lorenzo†
The Pavillon Colombe, outside Rome
Four views of the garden at Gif-sur-Yvette
Black and white tulips
The Villar Perosa, near Turin
The Chinese bridge at Villar Perosa
Dogwoods at Kiluna Farm on Long Island†
A moated château in Flanders

Copyrighted Material

SECTION IV *(between pp 212 and 213)*

Statuary and pool at La Leopolda on the Riviera
The olive grove at La Leopolda
Ramped steps at Chalet Thorenc
Osteospermums at Beaulieu-sur-Mer
Stone steps, South of France
Outdoor pots in a hilltop garden in the South of France
Colour co-ordination of house and terrace, South of France
An old water vessel as a terrace ornament
A grand approach to the head of a canal, Northern France
The canal seen from another angle
Two aspects of the canal at La Loggia near Turin

SECTION V *(between pp 276 and 277)*

A loggia overlooking a watergarden in the South of France
A glazed *vase d'Anduze*
The garden at the Frick Museum in New York†
Swimming pool and water garden at St Jacques, near Vence
Blue *Scilla peruviana* in the South of France
Phormiums and water lilies at St Jacques
Pool in a hillside garden
Oval pool with coloured brick surround
Swimming pool at Villa Isoletta at Eze-sur-Mer
Contrasts of stonework
Circular pool and fountain in Paris
Changes of level in a Paris garden
Two views of a Paris roof garden
French garden created at Chelsea Flower Show

SECTION VI *(between pp 340 and 341)*

Two views of the driveway at Castel Mougins, near Cannes†
Lavender in the South of France
Agapanthus in the South of France
Three views of the garden at Villa Silvio Pellico, near Turin
(including angled view of the garden from house)†

Copyrighted Material

The Garden at Soto Grande on the Costa del Sol
Pavilion showing a Moorish influence
Patio with tangerine trees and pink bignonia†
Steps in the garden at La Mortella on the island of Ischia
The view from the terrace of La Mortella†
The Moorish pool and rill at La Mortella†

Photographs marked † are by Marina Schinz and © Marina Schinz. The photograph marked ‡ is by Sydney Newbery, courtesy of Denis Wood, that marked * is © Mâcon and the one marked ** is © Boucher. All other photographs are by Russell Page, © the Executors of the Estate of Russell Page.

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

Introduction to the 2023 Edition

What is so remarkable about Russell Page is that unlike many garden designers and landscape architects he was content to describe himself quite simply as a gardener. His schemes may have been grand and, when occasion demanded, grandiose – he worked for those whose pockets were deep and whose estates were large – but their creator steadfastly cherished the modest yet accurate appellation he used in the title of this book. I admire him for that.

Read the accounts of those who knew him and you will find it hard to pin the man down, just as they did. He could be charming; he could be aloof. He was impressed by power and wealth but in that respect he was not alone in the artistic community – think Lucian Freud, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, Humphry Repton, Joseph Paxton and every single *haute couturier* whose work has graced the Paris catwalks.

Page worked for clients as diverse as Fiat heir Gianni Agnelli, and the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth) at Royal Lodge, Windsor Great Park. He created gardens for Viscount Weymouth at Longleat and for the Frick Collection in New York. Page boasted many well-heeled and influential clients, including the head of CBS Bill Paley and his wife Barbara ('Babe'), described as the most glamorous member of the high-society set and by Truman Capote as having 'only one fault: she was perfect; otherwise she was perfect'.

So many aspiring garden designers come to the craft from the 'design' end. Page came at it from the 'garden' end, which, to my mind, makes far more sense: learn about the materials first, and then how they may best be used. The wider the designer's plant vocabulary and horticultural know-how, the more successful – and interesting – the gardens are likely to be.

Page's own interest in plants was sparked during his Lincolnshire childhood when, aged fourteen, he bought an alpine campanula at a local agricultural show and constructed a rock garden to accommodate it. (His schooldays at Charterhouse in Surrey – good at art but otherwise unremarkable – were interspersed with holidays spent back home in Tattershall.) By the age of seventeen he was taking commissions to design and build rock gardens, and broadening his knowledge

Copyrighted Material

by visiting the gardens of such luminaries as Lawrence Johnston at Hidcote Manor in Gloucestershire and Gertrude Jekyll at Munstead Wood in Surrey.

This horticultural knowledge, and the skills required to put it into practice, were already well established when, in 1923, he went to the Slade School of Fine Art in London and studied under the tutelage of the revered Henry Tonks, who had taken on Rex Whistler a year earlier.

This combination of art and gardening was to set a pattern for his life – he worked with Stéphane Boudin of Maison Jansen, the famous Paris interior design firm, but also made a friend for life of the famous French horticulturist André de Vilmorin.

In the late 1920s, back in the UK, his garden design work began in earnest, alongside landscape architects Richard Sudell and Geoffrey Jellicoe. During the Second World War he worked with the BBC setting up foreign language services and worked in Cairo, the United States and Ceylon, and in 1951 he contributed designs for the Festival of Britain Pleasure Gardens in Battersea Park.

The OBE he was awarded in 1952 in recognition of his work was the first given to a British landscape architect.

His reputation grew, as did his impressive clientele – the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the King of the Belgians, William and Susana Walton on the island of Ischia, Mr and Mrs Charles Wrightsman in the United States. He began the life of travel – across Europe and to the US – that would set the pattern for the rest of his days, though he did return to London from his base in Paris in 1962, the year that *The Education of a Gardener* was first published.

'I know more about plants than most designers, and more about design than most plantsmen,' he is recorded as saying, and *The Education of a Gardener* shows that he also knew how to translate his thoughts into print in a particularly readable style. Through it all shines the enthusiasm of someone who simply loves growing plants.

Page's writing is personable as well as practical; he shares his thoughts on the suitability of different plants for different situations and the all-important belief that perhaps the most important quality in any design is scale.

Having collaborated with Sudell and Jellicoe earlier on in his life, he seems to have been at his most content working alone, as he did in his later years on modest-sized commissions and massive undertakings such as the 140-acre PepsiCo sculpture park in Purchase, New York.

But the simple pleasures of gardening remained. He never lost the thrill encountered when meeting a new plant for the first time, or of sniffing a fragrant rose. Above all he relished the challenges inherent in

Copyrighted Material

designing a garden. Of all the art forms it remains the most complex: shape, scale, form, texture and colour are all affected by a fourth dimension – that of time. A view will change, not only with the seasons, but also with the passing of the years. Adding this to the mix provides the greatest challenge of all.

The partnership between art and nature was one that fascinated and challenged Russell Page to the end of his career; the thoughts and beliefs that he sets down here are, along with those of his gardens that remain, a worthy legacy of a master of the art of garden design. 'Processes have always given me more satisfaction than results,' he said, and as any real gardener knows, gardening is all about the delights of the journey – the destination itself is never reached.

Alan Titchmarsh MBE VMH DL, 2023

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

Foreword to the 1994 Edition

Asked in the radio programme Desert Island Discs which book, apart from Shakespeare and the Bible, he would wish to take into isolation with him, the composer Sir William Walton replied unhesitatingly "Russell Page's *Education of a Gardener*". From the days of his youth when he had lived with the Sitwells, Walton had spent his life among writers and artists. A repository of genius himself, he was closely familiar with genius in others. He recognised it in Russell Page. But with the modesty reflected in the title of his single book, Page always gave his occupation as "gardener".

He loved handling plants and he drew them constantly throughout his life. To him, plants of all kinds, from giant trees to lowly alpines, were more than the medium in which he worked. Plants and the environment natural to them were the unquenched springs of an inspiration to which he must minister, accommodate, even reverence. I know this from the long and excited conversations we had about plants and gardens in the London flat he chose because the windows overlooked a view dominated by two winter-flowering cherry trees, and from the talk we had as we tramped around gardens. On such expeditions he was the most enriching of companions. His eye for a plant and its setting was acute, his visual memory of plants and gardens he had seen, sometimes only fleetingly, was vivid and his recall instant.

Long before he had begun to train as a painter Page had learned what he regarded as the elements of his trade from a head gardener working near his childhood home. Those days were never far from his memory. I recall that when he again met Mr Johnson, as he always respectfully called him, after a lapse of many years, his delight was as great as at his first meeting with the great Brazilian artist with plants, Roberto Burle Marx, at Kew Gardens when both were in their seventies and each a celebrity of world renown.

Copyrighted Material

Throughout his long career, whenever one of his gardens was being planted, he insisted on putting each plant in its specified position with his own hands whenever possible. Russell Page's preoccupation with the individual characters of plants and the techniques of gardening seem a long way from the expansive landscapes he created in the classical Ile de France tradition. Some who have attempted to assess his work have taken this as his characteristic style. The truth is rather that it was simply one deriving from the landscape where he was required to work in his earlier days. As his practice and reputation grew and he received calls from further afield he drew on the local traditions and natural environment wherever he worked. Thus it is not so easy to identify Russell Page's signature on his gardens as it is on a painting perhaps by Cézanne or Seurat, or a work composition by, say, Stravinsky or Walton himself.

Indeed, the garden he created for the Waltons – some years after this book was first published, but illustrated in this new edition – shows the range of his versatility and, set beside the other illustrations, the confident mastery of his hand. At La Mortella he found a site that was a ravine created by some giant cataclysm in pre-history. He set himself to capitalise on its bizarre features, the rock-strewn hillsides, the crude irregularity of the terrain, the depth of fertile soil flung there by the eruption. Later, when water had at last been brought to the island of Ischia from the mainland, he exploited in his design the need to cherish this element in the way he had seen it conserved and channelled in dry gardens in the Middle East and Spain.

More than a generation of garden designers have emerged from the training schools since *The Education of a Gardener* was first published, an era when more words on the subject have been written each year than ever before, more gardens subjected to the public gaze by way of illustrations and the revolution in printing processes. This simply titled book holds its position of a classic by acclamation. It remains, in my belief, the most eloquent of gardening testaments and one of the most deeply thought works in the whole of the literature of horticulture and garden-making.

Copyrighted Material

FRED WHITSEY

Preface to the 1983 Edition

This book is now twenty years old and I am twenty years older. (In 1962 I returned to England to work as a garden consultant.)

As I had hoped this book has found its place at the bedside rather than on the coffee table and its appearance in this new edition has hardly been changed. This would in any case have been difficult, as not a few of the gardens made before its publication have changed owners, become neglected or even disappeared.

One of the main interests of my work in the intervening years has been its geographical extension. In Italy I came to know and love Rome and the countryside around from Bracciano to Anzio; and then Spain came into my range – first Motril on the coast below Granada, then westwards to Algeciras and north-east to Majorca. I worked too in Washington D.C. and in New York, but returned occasionally to design one or two new gardens in England.

Two trips to Western Australia gave me a glimpse of a surprisingly different flora and fauna: kangaroos hurtling through the air like stream-lined furry Concordes and, once, a flight over a thousand miles of desert blazing with flower colour after years of drought.

Latterly I have been on occasional forays to Chile, where the snow-covered volcanic peaks of the Andes cut the sky above blue lakes and hillsides are scarlet with embothriums and forests of drimys and eucryphia.

Like other English garden makers in this century I was at first very much influenced by the work of Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens. Over the years, working in France and Italy, my approach to designing was modified by the greater formality of classical French planning and the more sculptural approach of the Italian tradition.

Copyrighted Material

Another invaluable factor for me, and one well worth study by garden designers, has been the Japanese approach to garden design. My studies, admittedly only from books, taught me much. I would make no general criticism of the composition of Japanese gardens. They depend on another heredity and another culture. But there is one aspect of Japanese gardens from which I have learned much, and that is the relationship between objects in space. Examples of what I mean by this can be found in Chinese and Japanese drawings and nearer home in Spanish still-life paintings of the seventeenth century.

Whether I am making a landscape or a garden or arranging a window box I first address the problem as an artist composing a picture; my pre-occupation is with the relationships between objects whether I am dealing with woods, fields or water, rocks or trees, shrubs and plants or groups of plants.

My understanding is that every object emanates – sends out vibrations beyond its physical body which are specific to itself. These vibrations vary with the nature of the object, the materials it is made of, its colour, its textures and its form. Any tree has twigs, branches and a trunk – the bark on a twig is other than that of its trunk – the texture of foliage varies through the seasons. So too with a stone – the material and texture of marble differ from those of sandstone or granite, and like the shape and colour of a flower or a fruit these dictate the speed and spread of the emanations of each particular object and thus the interplay between objects.

I have experimented endlessly with this idea. Take, for instance, a glass, a bunch of keys, and an apple, and put them on a tray. As you move them around, their impact, the impression you receive from them, will change with every rearrangement. Many of their inter-relationships will be meaningless, some will be more or less harmonious, but every now and again you will hit on an arrangement which appears just. Out of doors you may have a building or a tree which is a fixed point you have to accept. Such an object or even a group of objects produces a specific vibration, which may require subduing or reinforcing; and so, aware of this factor,

Copyrighted Material

you start composing by adding or subtracting shapes and textures and using colours and tones to achieve the impression you want to make – whether dramatic or subdued, hard or soft, harmonious, or even strident – which might be necessary as a shock in preparation for a change of mood or scale.

It is perhaps impossible to formulate the importance of such overtones. You design a garden within all the limitations of a site, of a client's requirement, the climate and the nature of the soil, of the local culture and of your own capacities as artist and technician. All of this is, with practice, relatively straightforward, but if your garden is to have "magic" you have to take your work further and give it an extra dimension. I think that awareness of the interplay between objects, whether organic or inorganic, is of major importance if your garden is to be also a work of art.

Working around the Mediterranean I gained a knowledge of garden design in Latin countries, but it was only when I first went to southern Spain in the sixties that I became deeply interested in the Moorish gardens there, though I already knew their ancestry from time spent in the Middle East.

What is left of the complex of gardens at the Alhambra and the Generalife are perhaps well enough known not to need new description. These are the best preserved, but in the villages in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, down to the sea at Motril and eastwards to Malaga and beyond, I have found many traces of small Moorish gardens.

Next to the airport at Malaga there is a fine elaborate late seventeenth or early eighteenth century "Italian" garden of paved terraces, balustraded stairways, fountains and a quantity of statues and urns, the whole elaborate and effective. But I sensed that the site of both house and garden had been carefully chosen (as only the Moors knew how), and I set out to explore the less frequented areas of the garden where, sure enough, I found an octagonal fountain of the fourteenth century falling to pieces in a cabbage patch and a long canal-like reservoir which still feeds the later formal water garden. The Moorish influence in gardens

Copyrighted Material

goes right through Andalusia, noticeably in Seville and Cordoba, and there are at least three major gardens in Majorca, Raxa, Alfabia and La Granja. These and others are all well described in Constance Mary Villers Stuart's classic *Spanish Gardens*.

The Islamic culture, as such, dates from the middle or end of the seventeeth century. All its architecture, all its applied design and all its garden design can be seen to be founded on a few geometric forms: a cross, two lines crossed at right angles, squares, rectangles and two squares crossing each other diagonally. Most Islamic designs stem from this last figure which produces the endless variations and extrapolations of the octagon; though the hexagon also gave rise to a great variety of geometrical developments.

The accepted theory is that the water neccessary for irrigation was the basis of all early gardens through Persia and the deserts of Asia and the Middle East, and that the cruciform canals, the four rivers of Paradise, derived from the logical exigencies of irrigation. This is surely true as far as it goes but I suspect it is not the whole story.

If you, as did I, become interested in the origins of garden design, the need for irrigation, the hanging gardens of Babylon and the town gardeners of Pompei seem scarcely enough as historical documentation.

If water is a necessity for the cultivation of plants it has other and less easily described functions. "White" water, breaking waves, waterfalls, cascades and fountain jets are known to produce negative ions, which "clear the air" and make people feel well. At the thirteenth-century Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, the sick-bay was built over a weir on the river which flows under the buildings. Running water has special properties easily perceptible if you choose to examine your impressions of, say a duck-pond on a village green compared with a fast-flowing stream in a narrow valley.

Throughout history garden makers, whether Byzantine, Islamic, Romanesque, Gothic or Renaissance have, consciously or not, used water for other than utilitarian ends. Water seems to

Copyrighted Material

have been appreciated even without being understood: why and how can an underground source communicate with the water diviner's forked hazel rod?

I once visited a villa and its garden in Umbria, not far from Assisi. It had formerly been a monastery and there seemed nothing special about it to account for its particularly agreeable and harmonious atmosphere. It had a quite ordinary kitchen garden divided into the classical four quarters by paths. Did the sense of harmony I felt perhaps derive from the fact that under the flagstoned paths were channels of running water?

By now I was hot on the trail and looking much more carefully at gardens I most admired – or should I say enjoyed – in order to see the part played by water.

The Villa Lante at Bagnaia, near Viterbo, was an obvious starting point. Here Vignola chose a wooded hillside site where high up in the woods there was a spring. We know the result – two pavilions and a great parterre with its central pool fed by a jet supported by Gian de Bologna's superb bronze figures. The water channels rush down the central staircase from the hillside, past the stone dining table and its stone benches which are uncomfortably decorated with surprise water jets. Higher up are two small flanking pavilions, and out of sight in the woods above, the spring which is the origin of the whole composition. All of this is stylish High Renaissance exuberance, which I can find admirable but not touching. Where was, where is, the magic in this place? For me it lies in an inconspicuous detail at the place where the two little pavilions above the rioting cascades act as gatehouses to the woods behind them, for round the base of each pavilion there is a narrow and unnecessary stone channel filled with running water which suggests continuity between the unseen springs in the woods above and the babbling cascades which come to rest in the balustraded pool of the main parterre.

Next I looked at the Villa Madama, Raphael's unfinished palace on Monte Mario, some distance east of the Vatican. The garden, as it stands, is simply a long terrace levelled out of the hillside with retaining walls below and above and, on a lower

Copyrighted Material

terrace, a large tank for water storage. In these rather empty if well proportioned spaces I found nothing to account for the singular charm of the place until I concluded that somewhere there had to be running water. Wandering through a wrought-iron gate at the far end of the unkempt terraced garden I came out to a hillside with huge old trees composed in groups as though Giorgione had had a hand in their disposition; amongst them was a rocky mound and, in a little grotto in the rock, the spring which the quality of the whole garden had made me sure I would find.

At the Villa Aldobrandini at Frascati, near Rome, from a spring in the chestnut woods on the hills behind the house, water was brought down in a simple stone channel to make a steep ladder of gushing water which feeds the Nymphaeum, whose elaborate Renaissance facade faces the Villa across the entrance courtyard.

Mid-seventeenth-century European gardens were laid out as rather simple geometric parterres, where fountains, large or small, accented the crossing of paths or the centre of a pattern of beds. To suit his patrons' tastes Lenotre elaborated these geometric patterns with curling embroideries of clipped box; but the basic skeletons of the plans he made usually depend on a pattern of water, sometimes very large. The long tradition of the geometrical structuring of gardens compartmented by the geometric use of water survived until the mid-eighteenth-century. Switzer's formal canals and the octagonal pond at Studley Royal would have been well understood by the monks of Fountains Abbey a short mile upstream.

Elsewhere in England, Lancelot Brown was encouraging his wealthy clients to tear out their splendid formal gardens and replace them with his facile compositions of grass, tree clumps and rather shapeless ponds and lakes. Such vagaries, on a huge scale, may appear irrelevant to the problems of garden designers in the latter half of the twentieth century, but I can only think that the formlessness of so many modern gardens stems from this earlier decadence.

Another reason for the frequent lack of consideration given to the underlying structure of contemporary gardens is that modern

Copyrighted Material

gardeners have a far greater choice of plants. The elite among them know and care for rare and unusual plants which they collect and cultivate with care and skill. However they tend to be less interested in the visual relationships of form and colour.

Faced with a garden to design I have always tried to think about the shape it might take, of how I would want to move through the area, what existing features and what necessities such as circulation might be dealt with, and at the same time remain aware of the kind of plants I wanted or might need to use – for their forms, colours and textures would to a great extent influence the basic structure. When the vegetation is going to be complex, in form and colour and variety, I will tend to make a basic plan or framework which will ensure a slow progress through the garden, perhaps to the point of avoiding any long views or vistas which would tend to draw one on too quickly to see the next change in the garden scene. It does not matter whether one is composing informally with a play of curves designed to underline the forms of individual plants or groups of plants, or whether for other reasons one needs to use a more rigid framework for the same plants which must always be kept in mind. This implies a modulation but a calculated one, in the appreciation of your plant material. You can use any plant you like and by its placing vary the impact it will make. A square block of any one subject, in sunshine, will give a different impression from the same quantity of the same plant planted informally, say in semishade. Such processes in thinking and in the realization of a garden sound laborious and difficult. In fact they are not – the mind takes the habit of considering these and other factors simultaneously; all is present, only remains the work.

With practice the whole operation becomes in a sense organic and the garden itself becomes an organic unity. If, for any reason, I need a more formal garden the process is more or less the same – the difference lies in the visual impact. Formal shapes are taken in far faster, but what you may gain in clarity you may lose in mystery.

Copyrighted Material

You will quickly read a formal pattern and a symmetrically

planned garden and even move through it faster. In such gardens you will group colour differently and use both forms and colours to make clearer and sharper contrasts.

Rain, clouds and sunshine, many climates, the landscapes of the world and all its growing plants to learn about, choose from and use, the contributions of painters and architects and sculptors of many cultures to absorb and learn from – all of these can teach a gardener magic and make that gardener content.

For fifty years and more I have been a privileged man occupied for almost the whole of that time in doing what I most enjoyed – designing gardens. I only once and very briefly had a garden of my own – a plot behind a London house.

I am very aware of the hundreds of people from whom I have learnt everything I know about my chosen subject: clients, friends, gardeners, masons, labourers, contractors, architects, horticulturalists, garden owners and garden lovers, botanists, students, writers, sculptors and painters.

Known briefly or for years across five continents and in a dozen countries, all freely shared with me their knowledge with kindness, encouragement and interest.

I salute them all.

RUSSELL PAGE
1983

Copyrighted Material

Acknowledgements

I would, first of all, like to say how much this work owes to my wife who insisted that some account of a garden-maker's activities would be of interest to amateurs and professional gardeners. Her active help and encouragement at every stage and on every level alone made the book possible. I have also to thank Miss Solita Solano and Madame Kadloubovsky for their helpful editing of the first drafts, and still another old and valued friend, Mr. Roy Hay, for his invariably good advice and for his enthusiasm for the project.

Mr. Fred Whitsey has been good enough to check plant names and bring my old-fashioned nomenclature up to date—no easy task with the constant re-naming of old favourites.

I would also thank Mr. Thomas Kernan, Editor of *Maison et Jardin*, Mr. A. D. B. Wood, Mr. Sidney Newbery and the British Travel and Holidays Association for their kindness in giving me permission to use the four photographs in the book which I did not take myself. I have, in general, preferred to use my own photographs since, in spite of their technical shortcomings, they more exactly reflect the points I wished to make clear.

Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Mark Collins and Mr. Robert Cross for their advice, their assistance and their patience.

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

INTRODUCTION

The education of a gardener

I last had a garden of my own when I was eighteen. Since then my main occupation has been designing gardens for other people. I have worked in England, France, Belgium, Switzerland and in Italy, occasionally in Egypt, once even in Persia, and in the Eastern United States. I have also seen gardens in India, in Ceylon, in Isfahan, in the Lebanon, Scandinavia, Holland and Germany. I have planted window-boxes and cottage gardens, housing schemes for industrial workers, layouts for factories. I have worked for landowners and great industrialists, for corporations and companies, for the very rich and for the poor, for professionals and for amateurs. Through the years this has added up to a wide and special experience. I write "wide" deliberately. I know nothing whatever of many aspects of gardening and very little of a great many more. But I never saw a garden from which I did not learn something and seldom met a gardener who did not, in one way or another, help me. Perhaps if I had spent these last thirty years making my own garden I would want to share that different experience. As it is, whatever the terms or the place, however different the physical circumstances, I have always tried to shape gardens each as a harmony, linking people to nature, house to landscape, the plant to its soil. This is a difficult standard to achieve and realisation has always fallen far short of the concept. At each new attempt, I see that which is superfluous, that is, everything which clutters up my understanding of a problem must be discarded. Everything which detracts from the idea of a unity must go.

Copyrighted Material

I started to understand something about plants by handling them. It was on one summer holiday when I was perhaps fourteen that, bored with the riding and jumping competitions at a local agricultural show, I wandered off to the flower-tent. There in an atmosphere hot and heavy with the smell of trampled grass, people, animals and flowers, my attention was caught by a tiny plant of *Campanula pulla* with three deep purple bells, huge in comparison with its frail leaves and the minute pot in which it grew. It was mine for a shilling and it opened a new world for me. I had no idea what to do for it nor how to make it flourish in the cold clay of a Lincolnshire garden. So off I went to the public library and within a few days I had found friends and teachers in Reginald Farrer with his *English Rock Garden* and Gertrude Jekyll with *Wall and Water Garden*, two people who had spent a life time with plants and gardens.

All my pocket money went on rock plants. All my holidays were given to my own personal corner of the garden. I would bicycle for miles to get a basket of leaf-soil, I would steal grit, sand or gravel from roadside heaps and I would borrow a horse and cart to collect stones which were hard to come by in our stoneless countryside. My campanula died but meanwhile I had seen a picture of *Primula farinosa*, fallen in love with it and learned that it grew wild in Yorkshire. I had to lure my father who liked bird-watching, into the Yorkshire dales. There I walked miles questioning every passer-by and after a three weeks' search I eventually found an abandoned quarry starred with the pale mauve treasures that I sought.

When I was a small child there was a market each Friday in the old Palladian butter market near the Stonebow in Lincoln. The farmers' wives would drive in early in the morning, dressed in their best, with baskets of fresh butter, eggs, chickens, ducks and bunches of freshly picked mint and sage. I used often to be taken there by my grandfather's housekeeper while she made her purchases, and I remember that always, in the spring, there would be bunches of double mauve primroses and of the heavenly-scented *Daphne mezereum*. Later when my passion for gardening

Copyrighted Material

developed I wanted these plants but could never find them in our friends' gardens. They seemed to grow only in cottage gardens in hamlets lost among the fields and woods. I gradually came to know the cottagers and their gardens for miles around, for these country folk had a knack with plants. Kitchen windows were full of pots with cascades of *Campanula isophylla*, geraniums, fuchsias and begonias all grown from slips. I would be given cuttings from old-fashioned pinks and roses which were not to be found in any catalogue, and seedlings of plants brought home perhaps by a sailor cousin—here was a whole world of modest flower addicts.

It must have been my father who told me of a certain elderly lady devoted to flowers who lived in a Victorian Gothic house almost in the shadows of the three great towers of Lincoln Minster. One day I knocked on her door. She opened it herself and stood there, tall and gaunt, with wild grey hair and the relics of great good looks, dressed in the fashion of thirty years before. " Please be careful where you walk," said the lady—a necessary warning as half the coloured encaustic tiles flooring the dark hallway had been taken up and one had to play hop-scotch to avoid a chequer board of Asiatic primula seedlings which grew in the spaces left by the missing tiles. The drawing-room was gardened in another way; ivy had been brought in through holes in the wall to garland windows, walls and ceiling with green. This lady had lived in India where, over many years, she had made lively precise water-colour drawings of flowers, musical instruments, jewels and household objects which filled a whole pile of albums. Outside, in an old sycamore tree, a rickety bamboo ladder led up to a platform among the branches which she called her " machan " though the neighbour's cat was the only tiger she could stalk. There was a rock garden too, contrived as a home for frogs, lizards and grass snakes. Finding it colourless in the winter, she had imposed on it colonies of brightly coloured toad-stools which she told me she made herself from the lids of boot-polish tins and old tooth brushes. I was always welcome. There were no set meal-times; " A little food

Copyrighted Material

every two hours is better," she would say, bringing me a plate of pineapple, or custard, or a sandwich.

So I gardened as I could, learning my few plants intimately, handling them, getting to know their likes and dislikes by smell and touch. " Book learning " gave me information, but only physical contact can give any real knowledge and understanding of a live organism. To have " green fingers " or a " green thumb " is an old expression which describes the art of communicating the subtle energies of love to prosper a living plant. Gradually I came to recognise through idiosyncrasies of colour, texture, shape and habit the origin of a plant and its cultural needs.

My apprenticeship to the art of garden composition was also on a small but very practical scale. I was seventeen when I was given a grass slope, a few cartloads of the local ironstone, a few bags of cement, some plants and a piped water supply with which to make a small rock and stream garden. For three months I really lived in and with this miniature world as I struggled with my pocket landscape. Each stone represented the possibilities of a cliff or a mountain top, my dribble of water could be lake or river or cascade and three pigmy junipers were a forest. A few moist and shady inches on the north side of a stone were a Himalayan bog for *Primula rosea*; a handful of grit on the sunny side of the same stone stood for a hot stony hillside in which to grow aethionema or androsace. A six inch fall of water was a Niagara and my friends who came to visit me at work I saw only as giant feet and legs, so immersed was I with my Lilliputian problems. At seventeen my keep and a new tennis racket were sumptuous extra rewards for all that I was learning about colour, scale and texture, and about plants and their likes and dislikes.

Friends passed me on from house to house while I continued making rock gardens, always learning, with scratched hands, wet feet and often an aching back. I know now that one cannot be taught to design gardens academically or theoretically. You have to learn the ways and nature of plants and stone, of water and soil

Copyrighted Material

at least as much through the hands as through the head. England in the twenties was a good place in which to learn gardening for there was still a leisured class, already short of money but with time, culture and taste.

One of my earliest jobs was to make a rock garden in a Rutland field where the limestone of the Oolite Belt is near the surface and has provided the material for lovely villages where manor, church, farmhouses and cottages were built of fine ashlar with Colley Weston stone tiles for roofing. North Luffenham, the village where I was working, had a fine thirteenth-century church and next to it was the manor house, Caroline on one side, Queen Anne on the other. In a field beyond the orchard its owners had recently discovered the ruined walls of an old fish-pond and a spring. Through the hard frost of the spring of 1929 which continued, if I remember, till mid-April, I toiled away with a stable-boy to help me, harnessing the spring to make a streamlet running between and over stones out into the field below. We planted the garden with rooted cuttings and all sorts of plants acquired by exchange with neighbours. All through this time I was learning fast and my host, happy to find a young enthusiast who shared his passion, was always carrying me off to see gardens nearby or away on week-end visits to other garden lovers.

I learned about plants rather quickly. By dint of holding them I began to suspect from their " feel " and their appearance what kind of conditions they would enjoy and soon I began to be able to guess their place of origin. I learned their names simply by writing down in full the name of any plant I saw for the first time. Even now when I see a plant which I cannot name for the second or even for the fiftieth time, I write out the name: in the end one learns it.

It was on one of these gardening visits that I first went to Gloucestershire and came to know Mark Fenwick and his then famous garden at Abbotswood near Stow-on-the-Wold. Mark Fenwick was already an elderly man crippled by arthritis. For thirty years he had been turning a Cotswold hillside into a

Copyrighted Material

paradise for plant lovers. The house, rearranged by Lutyens, had a series of rather over-mannered formal terraces and gardens which had, at the time of which I write, lost to some extent their owner's interest. He had been busy making part of his hillside into a "wild" garden where several small streams and a few outcropping stones were the excuse for a huge collection of rock and water-loving plants, alpines and flowering shrubs. Morning and afternoon, Mark Fenwick would heave himself into his electric bath-chair, see that his note-book and pencil were securely fastened to his coat by bits of string, summon Mr. Tustin his head gardener, and off we would set. In spite of his bewildering collection of different plants, Mark Fenwick showed an extraordinary taste. His plants looked happy and he managed to arrange their placing with a delicate sense of colour and a remarkable appreciation of form and texture. I came to know this garden at every season, from the first young growth of *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* and the flowering of the tulip species, anemones and primulas in spring to the October scarlets of Japanese maples, the mauve of autumn crocuses and the muted tones of the heath garden in winter.

A feeling of youth and gaiety ran right through the garden and most touching of all was my host's enthusiasm, his patience with youth and ignorance, his vitality and good spirits. He seemed happy to inculcate his love and knowledge of gardening into anyone who wished to learn.

The well-watered, well-drained and sheltered valleys of the Cotswolds are good gardening country and we used often to set out over the clover-scented hills to see neighbours' gardens. Not far away, the gardens at Hidcote near Chipping Campden were reaching full maturity. Lawrence Johnston, their owner and maker, had come as a young man from the United States and had bought a small stone manor house set in green fields with no garden. Little by little, he built up the now famous complex of gardens which, in my view, rank him as a considerable artist. The theme of the Hidcote garden is a series of small enclosures carefully related in their scale to the modest house. Each enclosure

Copyrighted Material

was devoted to plantings where, usually, one colour predominated. The various small gardens were carefully linked and separated by long axial lines; and, so that the richness of the planting should not appear confused, grass walks or lawns hedged with yew, beech or hornbeam were used as quiet interludes. Perhaps Lawrence Johnston's most important contribution to modern gardening was his ability to combine plants in an unusual way. I remember a double border of old-fashioned roses combined with the equally old-fashioned *Paeonia officinalis*. The path between was edged with purple-mauve *Campanula portenschlagiana* and the mustard-green alchemilla which used to be called "Lady's Mantle." In this unexpected combination these old-fashioned plants seem to complement each other exactly and one sensed the result of careful thought and a good understanding of the nature of the plants involved.

I was to see more of Lawrence Johnston's work later in the forest of Montmorency near Paris, where at St. Brice lived Edith Wharton in a late Louis XV pavilion called the Pavillon Colombe. It had been built by a *fermier-général* for two sisters, supposedly his sweethearts, the Mesdemoiselles Colombe. Edith Wharton, whose little-known first book was on the then new subject of interior decoration, had filled the panelled rooms with books and eighteenth-century furniture. With Major Johnston's help, she made a garden setting exactly in the spirit of the house. A formal box garden, called the blue garden, which they made together still exists. Now its outer beds are filled with delphiniums, galtonias, anchusa and *Salvia patens* and the formal parterre in the middle with *Nepeta fassenii* and ageratum. Height is given by the blue hibiscus, *coeleste*, which have been kept clipped to about six feet high like pyramidal pear trees. From the house you walk through a wood and around a large stone-edged eighteenth-century pool to reach the flower gardens, which are again divided into compartments. Years later, opposite the blue garden, I worked with the Duchesse de Talleyrand who now owns the house, to make another formal garden with clipped yews and two fine stone vases. The beds in the garden are

Copyrighted Material

entirely planted with garden pinks whose silver foliage, along with the creamy stone of the vases which are set in a frame of silver santolina, are effective all the year round. From May to July there is a foam of rose and pink and white blossom and all the garden is heavily scented.

At this time I was also working in Devonshire at a great house which lay at the head of an estuary thrusting down between hanging oakwoods to the sea. Gardening in the extreme south west was altogether different. In that mild and almost frost-free and very moist climate all kinds of trees and shrubs flourish which cannot be made to grow elsewhere; in fact Devonshire gardens, full as they are of rare botanical species, seemed to me then like an exercise in Latinity. Eden Phillpotts came to the rescue with his admirable book on trees and shrubs, and another helpful pundit was Ashley Froude, son of the historian, who lived near Dartmouth and had a garden full of the rarest shrubs. Like most gardens in that region it was more interesting than effective. Nearby too was the home of the owner and manufacturer of a special gin, who, it was said, went into seclusion once each year to mix in secret the ingredients of his product. For the rest he was an expert on daffodils.

My problem here was rather special. I had to make a rocky stream and a garden which would come into flower only in autumn. This limited my choice, and the result tended to look a bit melancholy under the moist Devonshire sky; but the hunt for plants was fascinating. At that time there was an interesting botanical garden at Paignton; and Dartington Hall, where the Elmhirsts were in full swing with their educational and cultural experiments, had an excellent alpine nursery. Now the nursery has gone but the steep grass banks and the enormous yews of the fifteenth-century tournament ground have not changed; there is a fine collection of magnolias and Japanese cherries; and in the shade of an old oakwood near the house there is a garden all of camellias.

I spent most of that autumn working on my Devonshire Copyrighted Material garden. T. E. Lawrence used sometimes to come over on Sundays.

The flat terrain surrounding this small Louis XV château west of Paris called for a concentrated vista across a series of turf panels either side of the surviving pool *(see also overleaf)*. Perspective is increased by the pillar-like trees and the narrowing of the enclosures as the view recedes. In the traditional French style the boskage is contained by tall hedges

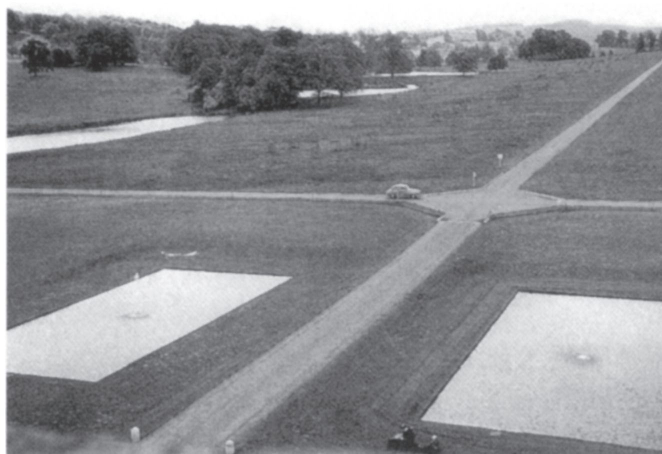
Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

Circular steps down from the château seen on the preceding pages. Bold scroll-shapes inserted in the massive retaining wall soften the overall rectangular scheme

Water is used *(see opposite)* in a much simplified treatment of a site that would have had areas of complicated *broderie* carried out in dwarf box

Copyrighted Material



Copyrighted Material

On the English estate at Longleat Russell Page helped to regain vistas concealed by overgrown plantings, set twin pools close to the forecourt of the mansion *(left)*, re-established box parterres *(below left)* and met the problem of crowd control by creating broad avenues in the enclosed areas

Copyrighted Material

These three views of the terrace at the Creux de Genthod in Switzerland show Page's solution to the problem of linking the level of the house with a much lower area below. *Right:* An ingenious device for linking the formal arc-shaped terrace with the wild area beyond: a curlicue in box echoes the classical French *broderie*.
Below and opposite: Placing the steps at right angles to the retaining wall avoids grandeur and economises on space. The stone is tooled in character with the decoration on the wall of the house and the broad, shallow steps at the foot emphasise the transition from house to garden

Copyrighted Material